

Information for Employers

Why should an employer be concerned about breastfeeding?

When employees continue breastfeeding after returning to work, there are many benefits to the employer:

1. **Healthier babies:** Breastfed babies are less likely to get ear infections, diarrhea, respiratory diseases, and other common childhood illnesses. Healthier babies mean parents miss less work – resulting in better productivity for employers. In addition, health care costs are significantly lower for breastfed infants.
2. **Happier employees:** Employees who feel supported in their decision to breastfeed report higher job satisfaction – resulting in less turnover of skilled employees and higher morale.
3. **Enhanced Recruitment:** Employers who support breastfeeding have added recruitment incentives for families as well as a positive image in the community

❖ *Details and references are on the next page*

How can I be a Breastfeeding-Friendly Employer?

In order to be a breastfeeding-friendly employer, you need to provide your employees with two basic things:

1. A **flexible schedule** for breastfeeding mothers, allowing them to take breaks to express milk for their baby or go to visit the baby for feedings.
2. A **private, sanitary space** in which the mother can either express milk or feed her baby.

In addition to these basic items, a breastfeeding-friendly worksite is enhanced by the following:

1. A written **company policy** stating your company's support and respect for a woman's right to breastfeed her baby.
2. Information packets given to all expectant parents encouraging breastfeeding, stating your company's support, and listing local breastfeeding resources.
3. Be sure that employee health insurance covers lactation consultant visits. Some programs will even pay for a breast pump.
4. Educate all employees about the breastfeeding policy. Support from coworkers is an important component of a breastfeeding-friendly workplace.
5. Provide a designated pumping room for breastfeeding mothers.
6. Provide 10-12 weeks of maternity leave – the extra time gives mother more time to heal, and helps get breastfeeding well established. Maternity leave should be 6-8 weeks minimum.
7. Offering paid maternity leave (either full or partial) makes your company particularly appealing when recruiting young families.
8. Allow a new mother to gradually transition back to work through a combination of part-time, flex-time, job sharing, and/or working from home.
9. Provide breast pumps either through company health insurance or at company expense (a quality breast pump generally costs around \$250-300).
10. If your company has several new or expecting mothers, engage the services of a lactation consultant to provide breastfeeding assistance.
11. Provide on-site child care so that mothers can conveniently visit their babies at feeding times.



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Breastfeeding and Your Bottom Line

Show Me the Numbers: How does breastfeeding support improve my bottom line?

- Companies that have adopted breastfeeding support programs have noted cost savings of \$3 per \$1 invested in breastfeeding support (1).
- Parental absenteeism is three times higher for formula-fed infants as compared to breastfed babies (3)
- Excess use of health care services attributable to formula feeding costs an HMO between \$331 and \$475 *per infant* in babies who never receive breastmilk (2).
- Insurers pay at least \$3.6 billion each year to treat diseases and conditions preventable by breastfeeding (2).
- Companies with an employee lactation support program experience less turnover and lower losses of skilled workers after childbirth. Additionally, these companies are rewarded with higher employee satisfaction, loyalty, and morale (1)
- For every 1000 never-breastfed infants, parents miss more than 2000 hours of work each year due to illnesses attributable to babies not receiving breastmilk (2, 4).

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that mothers breastfeed exclusively for the first six months, and continue breastfeeding with the addition of complementary foods until the baby is at least one year old (5). The Department of Health and Human Services stresses the importance of facilitating the continuation of breastfeeding after mothers return to their jobs (6, 7)

How Can I Gain Recognition as a Breastfeeding Friendly Employer?

Breastfeeding Friendly Employer recognition is given annually by the Vermont Department of Health during World Breastfeeding Week in August. The awards are published in an annual press release, listed on the Department of Health website, and included in other promotional materials.

Applications and more information can be found on the Vermont Department of Health website: www.breastfeedvermont.info – click the link for the [Breastfeeding Friendly Employer Project](#).

- Breastfeeding Friendly Employer awards are given on three levels in order to recognize smaller employers who provide the basic support, as well as those companies who can provide “the gold standard” in support to their employees.
- The Breastfeeding Friendly Employer Checklist found at the Department of Health website provides guidelines to determine your company’s level of recognition.

References:

- 1) United States Breastfeeding Committee. Workplace Breastfeeding Support [issue paper]. Raleigh, NC: United States Breastfeeding Committee; 2002.
- 2) United States Breastfeeding Committee. Economic Benefits of Breastfeeding [issue paper]. Raleigh, NC: United States Breastfeeding Committee; 2002.
- 3) Cohen, R. Mrtek, MB, Mrtek RG. American Journal of Health Promotion 1995; 10:148-5
- 4) Ball T, Wright A. Health Care Costs of Formula-feeding in the First Year of Life. Pediatrics. Volume 103, Number 4, April 1999.
- 5) American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement, “Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk.” Pediatrics 97; 100:6.
- 6) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. HHS Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding, Washington, D.C. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health, 2000.
- 7) United States Breastfeeding Committee (2001). Breastfeeding in the United States: A National Agenda. Rockville MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau.